

## Dreams and Illusions

by Jim Ancil

*Dreams and Illusions* is the name of the exciting new show of Shedrich (Shad) Williams' work, opening May 1 at the Photographic Image Gallery. The gallery, owned by Guy and Caroline Swanson, is located at 208 S.W. First and is part of the attractive downtown area popularly called Gallery Row.

This latest showing of Shad Williams' photos consists of all completely new work never exhibited before and covers a wide range of subject matter and treatments. These photos, as all of Williams' work, are in black and white; this allows the photographer to concentrate on the play of light and shadow. As Williams has stated: "The element of light being the greatest mystery draws the soul of man to a creative point beyond any casual order of life. The mystery of light being as it is can only intensify that deeper concept of creative means..."

Indeed, this seems a fitting introduction to the very central element of Williams' images, that of mystery and fantasy. One of the Pacific Northwest's truly outstanding photographers, he is not particularly interested in the lushness of forests or grandiose landscape, but rather in the mystery of the individual's private inner world. This is cerebral photography, yet highly sensual. It is romantic and dreamlike, with an air of deep tranquility permeating every image.

Williams is also known as a pioneer in the development of male nude photography as a fine art form. His work will be remembered as part of the very successful *Nude Show* at this same gallery last year. This viewer was struck



immediately by Williams' ability to evoke so many feelings and overtones of meaning with such economical means. His photos often appear deceptively simple at first glance. The images are accessible and readily identifiable, usually clearly photographed and in focus. Yet this very accessibility draws the viewer into the deeper levels of significance. One finds oneself spinning off into a phantasmagoria of personal reminiscences, films, books, sweetly remembered acquaintances. For Williams, fantasy for its own sake is a desirable end in itself.

Few of his photos are titled, so specific images are here mentioned by subject matter. Many are photos of good-looking, muscular young men usually alone, although a double portrait of two young men of Mediterranean origin, very vulnerable and

sensitive, is exquisite. A blond young man appears in several shots, one particularly has him nude seated sideways and leaning toward the camera, with vague forms behind suggesting angel's wings. The same model appears masked in another with a dark halo around his head, mysterious and vaguely ominous. There is a mythological feeling to many of these shots, evoking the Orpheus films of Cocteau, perhaps. Mirrors play an important role in many pictures. Several of the models are veiled, in profile, or looking downward withdrawn from the viewer, lost in their own thoughts and dreams.

Flowers and dried plants appear prominently in Williams' work. Nearly always they are indoors, although there is one beautiful garden scene with water pouring from a spout. In other images, the fantasy element of certain vegetable forms plays visual puns on the male organ in various stages of tumescence. Dreams of music and the illusion of dance are alluded to, as well as the importance of spectacle and ritual in our lives. One picture captures a religious ceremony taking place, purposely out of focus to suggest the universality of this experience. In another, a woman in an elaborate dress is ascending a darkened staircase, her gown trailing behind

her. A pair of happy lovers are standing sideways in a doorway in another picture.

There is a striking portrait of the photographer's daughter, Dana Coco, against a draped American flag. Another unforgettable picture entitled "Apartheid" is one of the few with a title. In it a male nude body is hanging over the edge of a bed draped like a bier. The upper half of the body is covered by a sheet as if it had been severed. The stark setting with light from a window and an overhead lamp suggests the result of a relentless interrogation. On the wall there is a German poster of the Three Graces carrying away a dead figure. The poster is inscribed "Bewegung" (movement).

There are so many memorable pictures that space does not allow description of. Williams has an uncanny sense of placement and composition. Each shot is "just right" and arouses subtle subliminal feelings. His work is recognized internationally and is in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum and Museum of Modern Art, New York, as well as the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris and the Oregon Art Institute. *Dreams and Illusions* is at the Photographic Image Gallery through the month of May.

## Men in the Woods / Men by the Sea

by David Gutierrez

To be perfectly honest, when I first heard about Phoenix Rising assembling 60 to 75 gay men for an entire weekend at various isolated places in Oregon, great sexual thoughts arose in my mind.

When I attended my first gathering, I was not disappointed. Oh, one could have sex if that is what one felt one needed. However, the sex would have taken back seat to the love and support these men shared and gave life to during the weekend.

The idea is a rather odd one: Convince 60 to 75 men to pay a sliding scale of \$75.00 to \$135.00 for a weekend of — well, it's really difficult to say what for. See, there is no structure, nothing planned, no leader, no nothing. Each weekend is a self-designed experience. On the first day, all these men sit down and decide for themselves how they want to spend their weekend. I, being one with a high need for structure, and one being trained in the belief that large groups when left on their own are clumsy and inefficient, received a "real world" education. These groups somehow always manage to create a weekend that reaches in and pulls out intimacy, hugs, tears, and just plain good feel-

ings that last far beyond the weekend.

At the age of 25, I have been blessed with the loving and yet seemingly tragic experience of being able to say I have an ex-lover. My dreams of a long-term love have been hit by meteorites of painful reality (I'm sure my ex-lover feels the same). After one of my weekends at the gathering, I wrote what I saw happening between men who had either just met each other or had been in a loving relationship for 10 to 30 years. For me, these weekends never fail to recharge my belief that with or without a life-time love, I will continue to receive and give the love I need.

I have spent years in the emotional freezers of bars and other places. After a gathering weekend, I can come back to Portland and walk into the bars and no longer feel like someone had shoved me into the vegetable bin. I feel an emotional bonding, a warmth with those I had met during the weekend. If I've got to be in a freezer, I'd rather be huddled up next to the light bulb. Wherever your freezer happens to be, I hope that you will seek out these gatherings or experiences that will help you to open up the door and let the warmth of the bulb huddle around you.

If you would like to attend one of the *Men in the Woods* or *Men at the Sea* contact Phoenix Rising at 223-8299 and we'll put you on the mailing list. There will be a *Men at the Sea* retreat on May 30, 31 and June 1 (not Memorial Day weekend), so hurry and sign up (was that a sales pitch or what?).

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